

**I CLAIM AS MY INVENTION:**

1. A method for communicating shipping orders for postal matter between a shipper and at least one carrier, comprising the steps of:
  - receiving a shipping order, at an intermediary, from a shipper for at least one postal item;
  - selecting a carrier from among a plurality of available carriers according to at least one predetermined selection criterion, at a time selected from the group consisting of a time before receipt of said shipping order by said intermediary and a time after receipt of said shipping order by said intermediary; and
  - relaying said shipping order from said intermediary to the selected carrier.
2. A method as claimed in claim 1 comprising selecting said carrier at said intermediary after receipt of said shipping order.
3. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein shipping of said postal item has a conveyage remuneration associated therewith, and comprising the step of said selected carrier charging said intermediary for said conveyage remuneration, and said intermediary sending an invoice to said shipper for an invoice amount dependent on said conveyage remuneration.
4. A method as claimed in claim 3 comprising maintaining a shipper account of said shipper accessible by said intermediary, and deducting said invoice amount from said shipper account according to a predetermined debiting criterion.

5. A method as claimed in claim 4 wherein said intermediary deducts said invoice amount from said shipper account after receipt of said shipping order and selection of said carrier.

6. A method as claimed in claim 3 comprising the step of transferring said conveyage remuneration from said intermediary to a carrier account for said selected carrier according to a predetermined transfer criterion.

7. A method as claimed in claim 3 comprising acquiring, at said intermediary, a specified transport capacity from said carrier at least in advance of relaying said shipping order from said intermediary to said selected carrier.

8. A method as claimed in claim 1 comprising, after receipt of said shipping order at said intermediary, generating an identifier pair at said intermediary composed of a first identifier for linking with said postal item and a second identifier, said first and second identifiers having a predetermined relationship with each other, and forwarding said second identifier from said intermediary to said selected carrier.

9. A method for forwarding postal matter in a route from a shipper to a recipient, comprising the steps of:

at an intermediary, receiving a shipping order from said shipper for at least one postal item;

selecting a carrier for said postal item from among a plurality of available carrier according to at least one predetermined selection criterion, at a time

selected from the group consisting of a time before receipt of said shipping order by said intermediary and a time after receipt of said shipping order by said intermediary;  
delivering said postal item to said shipper to said intermediary;  
relaying said shipping order from said intermediary to said selected carrier; and  
relaying said postal item from said intermediary to said selected carrier.

10. A method as claimed in claim 9 comprising selecting said carrier at said intermediary after receipt of said shipping order.

11. A method as claimed in claim 9 wherein shipping of said postal item has a conveyage remuneration associated therewith, and comprising the step of said selected carrier charging said intermediary for said conveyage remuneration, and said intermediary sending an invoice to said shipper for an invoice amount dependent on said conveyage remuneration.

12. A method as claimed in claim 11 comprising maintaining a shipper account of said shipper accessible by said intermediary, and deducting said invoice amount from said shipper account according to a predetermined debiting criterion.

13. A method as claimed in claim 12 wherein said intermediary deducts said invoice amount from said shipper account after receipt of said shipping order and selection of said carrier.

14. A method as claimed in claim 11 comprising the step of transferring said conveyage remuneration from said intermediary to a carrier account for said selected carrier according to a predetermined transfer criterion.

15. A method as claimed in claim 11 comprising acquiring, at said intermediary, a specified transport capacity from said carrier at least in advance of relaying said shipping order from said intermediary to said selected carrier.

16. A method as claimed in claim 9 comprising, after receipt of said shipping order at said intermediary, generating an identifier pair at said intermediary composed of a first identifier for linking with said postal item and a second identifier, said first and second identifiers having a predetermined relationship with each other, and forwarding said second identifier from said intermediary to said selected carrier.

17. A method as claimed in claim 16 comprising forwarding said first identifier from said intermediary to said shipper for linking with said postal item.

18. A method for conveying postal matter from a shipper to a recipient comprising the steps of:

preparing a shipping order at a shipper for at least one postal item;  
forwarding said shipping order from said shipper to an intermediary;  
selecting a carrier for said postal item from among a plurality of available carriers according to at least one predetermined selection criterion, at a time selected from the group consisting of a time before receipt of said

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shipping order by said intermediary and a time after receipt of said shipping order by said intermediary;  
relaying said shipping order from said intermediary to the selected carrier;  
relaying the postal item to the selected carrier; and  
conveying the postal item from the selected carrier to the recipient.

19. A method as claimed in claim 18 comprising selecting said carrier at said intermediary after receipt of said shipping order.

20. A method as claimed in claim 18 wherein shipping of said postal item has a conveyage remuneration associated therewith, and comprising the step of said selected carrier charging said intermediary for said conveyage remuneration, and said intermediary sending an invoice to said shipper for an invoice amount dependent on said conveyage remuneration.

21. A method as claimed in claim 20 comprising maintaining a shipper account of said shipper accessible by said intermediary, and deducting said invoice amount from said shipper account according to a predetermined debiting criterion.

22. A method as claimed in claim 21 wherein said intermediary deducts said invoice amount from said shipper account after receipt of said shipping order and selection of said carrier.

23. A method as claimed in claim 20 comprising the step of transferring said conveyage remuneration from said intermediary to a carrier account for said selected carrier according to a predetermined transfer criterion.

24. A method as claimed in claim 18 comprising acquiring, at said intermediary, a specified transport capacity from said carrier at least in advance of relaying said shipping order from said intermediary to said selected carrier.

25. A method as claimed in claim 18 comprising, after receipt of said shipping order at said intermediary, generating an identifier pair at said intermediary composed of a first identifier for linking with said postal item and a second identifier, said first and second identifiers having a predetermined relationship with each other, and forwarding said second identifier from said intermediary to said selected carrier.

26. A method as claimed in claim 25 comprising forwarding said first identifier from said intermediary to said shipper for linking with said postal item.

27. A method for communicating a shipping order for postal matter between a shipper and at least one carrier, comprising the steps of:

at an intermediary, acquiring a specific transport capacity from a carrier;  
receiving a shipping order from a shipper for at least one postal item at said intermediary; and  
relaying said shipping order from said intermediary to said carrier and thereby making a reduction to said specific transport capacity.

28. A method as claimed in claim 27 wherein shipping of said postal item has a conveyage remuneration associated therewith, and comprising the step of said selected carrier charging said intermediary for said conveyage remuneration, and said intermediary sending an invoice to said shipper for an invoice amount dependent on said conveyage remuneration.

29. A method as claimed in claim 28 comprising maintaining a shipper account of said shipper accessible by said intermediary, and deducting said invoice amount from said shipper account according to a predetermined debiting criterion.

30. A method as claimed in claim 29 wherein said intermediary deducts said invoice amount from said shipper account after receipt of said shipping order and selection of said carrier.

31. A method as claimed in claim 27 comprising, after receipt of said shipping order at said intermediary, generating an identifier pair at said intermediary composed of a first identifier for linking with said postal item and a second identifier, said first and second identifiers having a predetermined relationship with each other, and forwarding said second identifier from said intermediary to said selected carrier.

32. A method as claimed in claim 27 comprising receiving said postal item at said intermediary and forwarding said postal item from said intermediary to said carrier.

33. A system for communicating shipping orders for postal matter between a shipper and at least one carrier, comprising:

a shipper's data processor located at a shipper;

an intermediary's data processor located at an intermediary;

a communication link for establishing at least a temporary communication connection between said shipper's data processor and said intermediary's data processor;

said shipper's data processor being programmed for sending a shipping order from said shipper via said communication connection for at least one postal item to said intermediary's data processor; and

at least one of said intermediary's data processor and said shipper's data processor being programmed for selecting a carrier for said postal item from among a plurality of available carriers according to at least one predetermined selection criterion, at a time selected from the group consisting of a time before receipt of said shipping order by said intermediary and a time after receipt of said shipping order by said intermediary.

34. A system as claimed in claim 33 further comprising a carrier's data processor at said selected carrier, a further communication link for establishing at least a temporary further communication link between said intermediary's data processor and said carrier's data processor, and wherein said intermediary's data processor is programmed for forwarding said shipping order via said further communication link from said intermediary's data processor to said carrier's data processor.

35. A system as claimed in claim 33 wherein said intermediary's data processor is programmed to select said carrier from among said plurality of available carriers after receiving said shipping order.

36. A system as claimed in claim 33 wherein conveying of said postal item by said carrier to a recipient has a conveyage remuneration associated therewith, and wherein said intermediary's data processor is programmed to access a shipper account to reduce said shipper account by an invoice amount dependent on said conveyage remuneration, according to a predetermined account reduction criterion.

37. A system as claimed in claim 33 further comprising a bank's data processor located at a bank at which said shipper has a shipper account, and further comprising a further communication link for establishing at least a temporary further communication connection between said intermediary's data processor and said bank's data processor, and wherein said intermediary's data processor is programmed to prepare and forward a debiting order, via said further communication link, to said bank's data processor for causing said bank's data processor to deduct an invoice amount from said shipper account, according to a predetermined debiting criterion.

38. A system as claimed in claim 37 wherein said intermediary's data processor is programmed to employ receipt of said shipping order and selection of said carrier as said predetermined debiting criterion.

39. A system as claimed in claim 33 further comprising a bank's data processor located at a bank at which said carrier has a carrier account, and a further communication link for establishing at least a temporary further communication connection between said intermediary's data processor and said bank's data processor, and wherein said intermediary's data processor is programmed for preparing and forwarding a transfer order via said further communication link to said bank's data processor for transferring a conveyage remuneration, for conveying said postal item, from an intermediary account to said carrier account, according to a predetermined transfer criterion.

40. A system as claimed in claim 33 wherein said intermediary's data processor is programmed to generate an identifier pair composed of a first identifier for linking with said postal item and a second identifier, said first and second identifiers having a predetermined relationship to each other, and for forwarding said second identifier to said carrier after receipt of said shipping order.

41. A system as claimed in claim 40 wherein said intermediary's data processor is programmed to communicate said first identifier to said shipper's data processor via said communication link.

42. A system as claimed in claim 41 further comprising a device connected to said shipper's data processor for linking said first identifier with said postal matter after receipt of said first identifier from said intermediary's data processor.

43. A system as claimed in claim 40 further comprising a carrier's data processor located at said carrier, and a further communication link for establishing at least a temporary further communication connection between said intermediary's data processor and said carrier's data processor, and wherein said intermediary's data processor is programmed to transmit said second identifier, via said further communication connection, to said carrier's data processor.

44. A system as claimed in claim 43 further comprising a checking device connected to said carrier's data processor for reading said first identifier linked with said postal item and for comparing said first identifier to said second identifier.